F.—Dr. MANSON'S Report on the Health of Amoy for the Half-year ended 31st March 1878.

THE health of this port during the six months was good. There was but one death amongst the residents, a case of phthisis, and none amongst the shipping. Amongst the Chinese there was no epidemic whatever. Cholera completely disappeared early in the autumn, and small-pox, usually so prevalent in the spring, has hardly shown itself this year.

The Plague in China.—The following notes by Mr. E. ROCHER of the Customs service will be read with interest. They prove unmistakably the existence of bubonic plague in China, and that this dread disease has spread over a larger area of late years than is generally known. They are of great value as showing that the disease did not entirely disappear between the years 1844 and 1873, as some epidemiologists believe, and thus do away with the necessity for the supposition that in the latter year there was a re-creation of the plague virus.

In 1844 the plague disappeared completely from Egypt and Turkey in Asia, and we were told to congratulate ourselves on being finally rid of the most terrible of all epidemic diseases. For years there was no sign of it in its favourite haunts, and there seemed good reason for the belief that it had become a thing of the past. But in 1873, after an absence of nearly thirty years, it once more broke out in Mesopotamia, and ever since has been steadily extending its area till last year it reached the shores of the Caspian. To account for this reappearance after so long a period of complete absence, some epidemiologists have propounded their belief in the spontaneous generation of the plague virus, as it is absurd to suppose that parasites could retain their infective powers for nearly thirty years. But in the light of Mr. ROCHER'S notes such a thing is unnecessary, as his dates bridge over twenty years at least of the thirty during which the disease was supposed to be dead, and show that an extensive epidemic may rage in mid Asia, and Europe be in complete ignorance of the fact. In such a country as Central Asia, where the distances are great and travelling very slow, we can understand that such a disease as plague would take a long time to pass from west to east and back again from east to west, and that an interval of thirty years might elapse before the disease returned again to the place whence it started. Our knowledge of the countries to the north of the Himalayas is so meagre, and communication with them so difficult, that the plague might pass through them without our hearing about it at all, and one can readily suppose that it did actually pass thus from Yünnan to Mesopotamia or Persia to originate the epidemic at present raging in these countries. Mr. ROCHER'S description of the disease is sufficiently clear to justify us in calling it plague.

NOTES ON THE PLAGUE IN YÜNNAN.

The sickness known in Yünnan under the name of Yang-tzŭ (痒子), and which appears to be nothing else than the plague, carries off yearly many victims from that province.

According to the men of note of the various districts, the disease appears to have been imported from Burmah. It is exceedingly difficult to say when it was first introduced. The learned say, and a great

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part of the population hold the same opinion, that the centre and east of the province were exempt from the plague until the outbreak of the rebellion, while others assert that it had appeared in the extreme west near Talifu several years before this date. It is extremely difficult to fix these dates, but supposing the last statement is correct, the disease must have passed over very lightly, seeing that neighbouring districts were not cognizant of its presence. Since the commencement of the civil war, however, it has spread over the whole province decimating the population.

There is a fact that inclines one to think that the epidemic is owing to exhalations from the soil, and it is this, those animals that live in the ground, in drains or in holes, are the first to be attacked. This is particularly noticeable with the rats. As soon as these animals are ill, they leave their holes in troops, and after staggering about and falling over each other, drop down dead. The same phenomenon occurs in the case of other animals, such as buffaloes, oxen, sheep, deer, pigs and dogs. All are attacked, but the dog less severely than the others.

When these phenomena appear, it is not long before the disease spreads to man, and knowing this, the people take every precaution to guard themselves from the plague. They begin to purify their houses by lighting fires in every room, and in certain towns they abstain from pork. In man the disease commences with a slight fever, which rapidly increases, and in a few hours becomes very violent. The patient clamours for drink, and his thirst is insatiable. By and by a dark red swelling shows itself in the armpits, groins, or neck, and the fever continuing to augment, the patient becomes rapidly unconscious. The bubo increases till the second day, after which it remains stationary, and when it has attained its full size it is about as large as a hen's or goose's egg. At this stage consciousness returns, but there is still great danger, for if the swelling, which up to this point is very hard, becomes soft, and if the fever still continues, the case is considered hopeless. On the contrary, if the tumour opens externally, which is a very rare occurrence, there is a chance of recovery. Some Chinese physicians have attempted to cut these tumours, but either they have delayed the operation till too late, or else they have performed it imperfectly, for few have survived this treatment. Many of the practitioners whom I have seen at work do not hesitate to declare themselves powerless, and instead of giving a quantity of medicine, as is their practice in ordinary cases, content themselves with prescribing large doses of musk as a last resource.

During my stay in Yünnan, I have seen a great number of people struck with this disease, and I can say that very few recover. In places where the plague passes but lightly through, one might estimate the mortality at about four per cent., while in places where it stops for some time whole families disappear one after the other, and the population is completely decimated, and in some districts the inhabitants, to avoid the violence of the pestilence, abandon their homes and harvests, and camp out on the heights, where even sometimes the epidemic follows them.

What to my mind aggravates the evil and brings about much greater mischief is the practice of not burying the bodies of those who die of this disease, which the superstitious Chinese have adopted. Instead of being buried, the body is placed on a bier and exposed to the sun. The idea is that all who die of the plague are possessed by a devil, and may not be interred, lest the repose of their ancestors be disturbed, and the sanctity of the Fung Shui interfered with. As a consequence of this practice, the traveller passing the outskirts of a village where the plague is raging is nearly choked with the nauseous smell emanating from the exposed and rotting corpses.

During the years 1871, 1872 and 1873, I remarked that the epidemic began about the commencement of the rice planting, that is to say in May or June. Onwards from this time its ravages were severe wherever it passed. During the summer, which in Yünnan is the rainy season, although the epidemic still held its course, yet it was of a milder character, but it is from the time the rain ceases to the end of the year that the disease is most active and deadly. A peculiar fact with regard to the track of the epidemic I have observed in several places both in the north and south of the province. Instead of visiting every village in its direct line of progress, it would pass some completely by, visiting places near them, and on both sides, to return to those forgotten spots, several months afterwards, when the epidemic would appear

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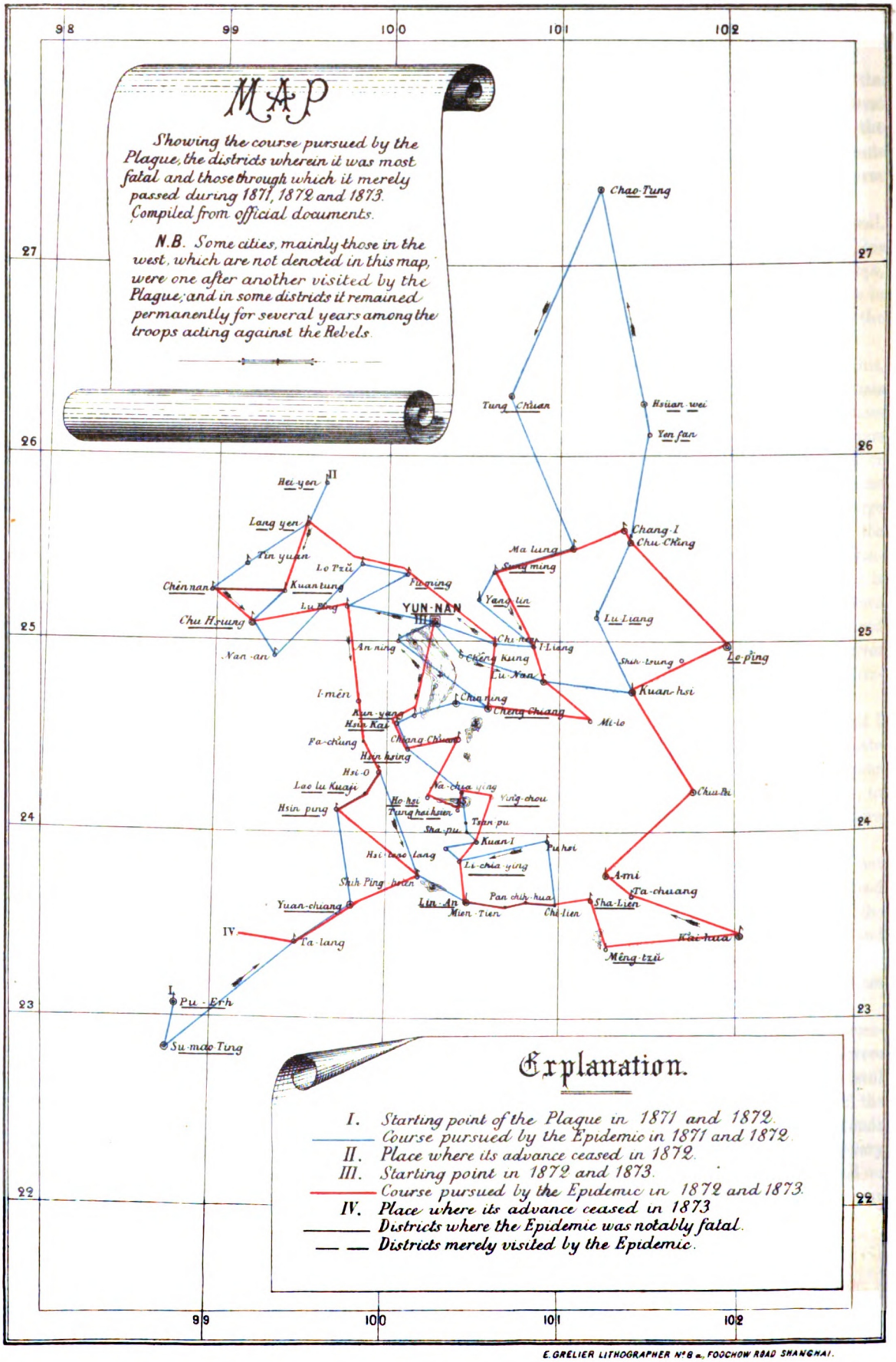

E. GRELIER LITHOGRAPHER N°8 a, FOOCHOW ROAD SHANGHAI.

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to have passed far away. Another fact not less curious is that, after having appeared in almost every one of the villages scattered about the plains, it ascends frequently the mountains, where among the aborigines, I-jên (夷人), who inhabit the high lands, it claims many victims. One is inclined to believe that the disease is imported by the men and women who descend into the valleys to barter, or work at certain seasons at the harvest, as it is chiefly the mountains adjoining the plains that are visited by the disease.

The map compiled from private and official memoranda shows the course followed by the plague during the years 1871, 1872 and 1873. I have not been able to include in it the towns of the west; this part of the province being at that time the seat of war between Imperialists and Mahomedans, the information obtainable was quite untrustworthy. However, I am quite certain that the epidemic was constantly present among the Imperial troops operating in this part of the province.

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